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ABSTRACT

The teacher selection process successfully used in a small district in Wyoming essentially involves advertising the vacancy, accepting applications, appointing a selection committee (including two teachers from the building where the vacancy exists), screening the applicants, inviting the top six candidates to come for interviews, and selecting the best applicant by vote. The selection process is concentrated on assessing the applicant's ability to deal with children. For this reason the interview sequence includes use of the Teacher Perceiver Interview and use of a separate group interview by the selection committee. The involvement of teachers on the selection committee assures teachers a role in the staffing process, focuses the selection process on the applicants' suitability to the classroom situation, and enables the applicant to feel understood and therefore more secure before the committee. (Author/PGD)

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SELECTION OF STAFF--THE KIDS COME FIRST!

by

LOREN H. DENNEY

It is an honor and a pleasure to be able to discuss with you a topic which is very important to all of us--SELECTION OF STAFF. The selection process is often identified as the single most important function of the school personnel administrator or hiring person. At the conclusion of my remarks, please be encouraged to voice your questions or comments. I would also appreciate hearing about hiring techniques that work well for you.

You have heard it said that some children are going to learn in spite of the teacher. Is that the quality and type of teachers you would like to have in your school? I think not.

Fellow Elementary Principals, we have a tremendous responsibility to provide high quality educational experiences for the children in our schools. They need to find school a loving and exciting place to be where they can encounter challenging and joyous learning activities while at the same time knowing success. I don't need to tell you that the children deserve our very best efforts. You already know that. Yes, even in my district with a school population of 600, which is located in the least populated county in the least populated of the 50 states in our great country and 100 miles from the nearest railroad, we know our children deserve our best efforts. Other things, such as the big game hunting, backpacking, fishing and winter sports are secondary. THE KIDS COME FIRST!

Without a doubt, the most valuable contribution that we can make--as principals--toward insuring that maximum learning occurs with each child is to leave no stone unturned in providing the best qualified teachers. Teachers that care about kids, are excited about teaching, and well qualified to do the job. You have heard it said that a school is only as good as its teachers. Research shows that early primary teachers have a significant effect on the child's success in later years. THEY MUST BE THE BEST!

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

When we are engaged in the hiring process, how can we be absolutely sure we are hiring a teacher who is the best qualified to provide the children with what they need and the parents expect? We can't. But my district has been using a procedure that drastically reduces the odds. For reasons peculiar to your area, every step of the procedure, as we follow it, may not be feasible, but there is no district or administrator in this great land of ours that cannot utilize parts, if not all, of the procedure. Certainly, the manner and techniques in using it are all important. The more you practice it, the better the results.

What are some of the things to look for? Look for teachers that know how to move beyond keeping children at the contact level and into higher stages of learning and development. Look for teachers who want to know, trust and will respect children. A school that aims to promote good character in its students will have a staff that works together, a careful hiring policy, a low turnover, and a general agreement on school philosophies. Careful hiring brings in people who support those philosophies. Good teachers are concerned about children as human beings, who genuinely respect their ability to learn, and who demands respect in return. About the best you can do is to learn to recognize those rare souls who possess these characteristics and move heaven and earth to get them into your school. It is the teacher and only the teacher who determines the quality of the air that is breathed in the classroom, and for five or six hours a day. However, there are structural forces in some schools that frustrate the attainment of these ends. In some school districts many hiring decisions are made "downtown." Salary patterns and clockwatching attitudes can also be frustrating. Modern teacher tenure and reward structures that encourage keeping ones nose clean and accruing postgraduate college credits do little to foster low in-school turnover, staff cooperation and commitment to character development in students. According to a recent survey of administrators, neat physical appearance, a favorable letter of recommendation from the applicants co-operating teacher and clearly stated professional goals head the list of desirable qualifications. Friends, if you fail to seek a firm determination of the impact the teacher would have on children, you will be missing the boat! Making that determination should be at the top of your list! An applicant could present an excellent appearance--neat and attractive--with the "open file" (Buckley Amendment) regulations have a beautiful letter of recommendation and rattle off an impressive list of professional goals and still care less about the impact they would have on children. The applicant could easily be one from whom students find it difficult to learn, whom students will not like, and from whom students cannot easily obtain help. If we don't make the investment of time and effort to seek out these qualities, we are short changing children! You need to find out what the applicant thinks about children. Teachers must have a good positive opinion about students.

I would like to share with you a process that has produced high quality teachers in our district. Obviously, the hiring procedures must originate with the Board as well as final approval of the candidate to be hired. Board policy sets the tone. This is our current policy which allows the flexibility needed to follow our procedure. Despite periodic review during the past six years, the policy has remained essentially unchanged. The first statement carries the implication to seek quality individuals with potential for growth. Any teacher, worth their salt, knows and realizes that regardless of how successful they may be, there is always room for growth and development. The second paragraph allows the superintendent to utilize the administrative and professional staff in the selection process. This is done in each case.

Step by step, our procedure is as follows:

1. The Board declares a vacancy and authorizes advertising for applicants to fill the vacancy. This occurs by formal motion during a Board Meeting.
2. The vacancy is advertised nationally through University Placement Offices.
3. Applications are accepted, including applicant volunteered information along with teaching credentials, transcript, of college credits and letters of reference. Applicants are invited to submit any other information they feel would strengthen their chances of being chosen to fill the vacancy. We are indeed fortunate to live in a beautifully mountainous area despite the long, cold winters. Consequently we receive many applications from people who desire to live in an isolated beautiful area.
4. A selection committee is appointed by the joint efforts of the superintendent and the Classroom Teachers Association. It is composed of:
 - A. Building Principal and Superintendent
 - B. CTA Representatives (usually two)
 - C. Two teachers representing the building having the vacancy. They may also represent the CTA.
 - D. Sometimes, but not always, one or two lay persons, parents, and/or Board members.

The committee will vary in size from seven to five members.

5. Each committee member screens all of the applications and selects those who appear to be the strongest and best qualified candidates. Usually four to six.
6. The committee then meets as a group and pools their individual selections. From this pool, a half dozen or less are agreed to be the best possibilities. Telephone conferences may be held at this time with these candidates and with some of the references given. Sometimes this tends to strengthen or weaken a candidates position. The telephone is used freely throughout in the hiring activities.
7. Applicants on this finalized list are invited to come for interviews. They are also made aware of the number they are competing with and that travel is at the expense of the applicant. Withdrawals sometimes occur at this point and they are accepted. If they agree to come to be interviewed, they are given the name of their host. The host is a member of the selection committee and is a teacher in the same or closely related area. The host will provide them assistance while they are in our district. This includes making lodging reservations, answering questions, providing local transportation, taking them sight seeing or assisting with housing search. The host tries to make their visit enjoyable and pleasant and make them feel welcome. We feel that it is important to make them feel that are sincerely a worthy applicant and that we truly appreciate them taking the time and making the effort to come to the interview. Often they are housed and fed in one of our homes even though there are plenty of motels and restaurants in town. Also, either a car is provided for them to use to view the scenery, search for possible housing or use as they wish or one of us will be their chauffeur. We intend for them to know without a doubt that we are most sincere and are glad they came. If they fly in, we will meet them at the airport. The nearest airport is 110 miles away. If we expect to get the high quality teachers we expect we feel that it is necessary to impart a warm, caring attitude and go out of our way to assist them.

8. Upon their arrival in the District, the applicant is given the Teacher Perceiver Interview followed by an interview with the Selection Committee. For those of you unfamiliar with the Teacher Perciever Interview, it is an interview designed to identify people having characteristics possessed by outstanding teachers and is produced by Selection Research, Inc. The two interviews are scheduled at the convenience of the applicant generally and so that they fit into the applicants travel schedule. Prior to the first interview, the applicant is informed that "should you become the successful candidate and be hired by the Board, your responses from both interviews will serve as a basis for your first teacher evaluation conference." This encourages the applicant to be completely honest with their responses and less prone to exaggerate their abilities. A word or two concerning interviews. An interview can be a total waste of time for the interviewee as well as the interviewers or it can be positive and productive for both. It is entirely up to the interviewer. You set the tone of the interview. What you receive from it will depend on what you put into it. In addition to learning how the applicant feels about kids and teaching you can learn about their personality, ability to communicate with others and other valuable traits necessary to successful teaching.
9. The very important voting and final selection procedure follows completion of the interviews. One negative vote by a committee member eliminates the applicant. The committee must agree unanimously that they can work with the applicant. Each applicant could be rated with numerical values by each committee member on every phase of the selection process. It could be on a scale of 1 to 5 or 1 to 10 and the applicant with the top score would be the one selected. These scoring sheets should be kept on file for several years or until you feel that none of the other applicants will challenge the selection. Thus you have a record of and documentation as to why a particular selection was made. We have not ~~done this in our District~~ and a selection made has never been challenged. Title IX advisors do recommend it however.

10. The successful applicant is told by the committee that he/she will be recommended for hiring contingent upon:

- A. Favorable results from contacts with references given.
- B. Favorable results from a possible visit to the applicants "home base" by a committee member. "Home Base" is the location where the applicant is known and has lived. Not necessarily where the applicant has attended college. This can and has helped to insure that the applicant will fit into the school and community and not find themselves in an incompatible situation where they would not be happy. It is not a witch hunt. An unhappy teacher likely will not make a good teacher.
- C. Acceptance by the Board of the written committee recommendation. Failure to accept the recommendation has not occurred.

But how do teaching staff members feel about serving on a selection committee--even during the summer, you may ask. Teachers say that they like to feel as if they are involved in decision making. It tends to make them more supportive of new staff members. They know that one poor teacher can affect the entire staff especially in a small district, such as ours. Thus, they will put forth every effort to help the new teacher succeed and also, they feel a real responsibility. ---"I helped select this teacher and I would like to feel that it was a sound selection." One staff member said that it tends to bring the entire staff closer together, that real interest is shown by selection committee members, and that better quality teachers result. This person also said that an individual responsible for selection could very easily select a candidate that just would not fit in. Teachers rather than administrators know more specifically what is needed in the classroom.

How do teachers who have been selected by this process feel towards it? One said that she had been through six interviews before ours. She said the questions our committee asked were much more varied in nature, they were relevant to teaching and it helped her ascertain the climate of the school. Since the candidates are encouraged to ask questions during the interview, the candidate can learn much about the teaching situation from other teachers on the committee. Also with teachers present, the applicants feel more at ease in answering questions. One teacher said that administrators, interviewing alone tend to question more on a personal basis whereas administrators on a selection committee with this process ask questions that are more relevant to teaching in the classroom. This person felt it was due to the presence of classroom teachers on the committee. Successful applicants have a real feeling of security and friendship the first day on the job because of having met and exchanged questions and comments with some of the staff members during the interview.

You say--"Great, if there are quite a few applicants but if only 4 or less apply--I don't know." As I said in the beginning, we have a primary--most important--responsibility to provide high quality educational experiences for the children in our schools. Therefore, regardless of the number of applicants it is imperative that we make every effort to determine the impact an applicant would have on the children. Don't settle for second best! The kids should not have to pay the price for our haste in wanting to fill a vacancy. Granted though, it is easier perhaps and more reassuring to have a larger number apply.

The process may sound somewhat lengthy and cumbersome, but we have found it works rather quickly and efficiently. When you consider the effect of a teacher on the children, it is darn well worth the time and effort spent in selecting the best! Some of our applicants have been formally hired within a few days of completion of the interviews. This method has produced strong staff members for our district. THE LAST VACANCY IN MY SCHOOL OCCURRED FOUR YEARS AGO AND it looks like there won't be any this year and I am glad for that for I feel we have a strong staff and the children are happy and responding. But remember. Don't allow yourself to panic and settle for second best if time seems to be running out. If you do, you will probably regret it later. I did panic once and settle for second best, and I barely escaped going to court when it became necessary to let that teacher go.

Let me review the steps of our process again and briefly:

1. The Board declares a vacancy and authorizes advertising for applicants.
2. The vacancy is advertised nationally through University Placement Offices.
3. Applications are accepted, including applicant volunteered information.
4. A Selection Committee is appointed.
5. Each committee member screens all of the applications and selects those who appear to be the strongest.
6. The committee meets and pares the list to a half dozen or less.
7. Invitations are extended to come for an interview.
8. Applicants are given the Teacher Perceiver Interview and are interviewed by the Selection Committee
9. Voting and Elimination procedure. The committee must agree unanimously on a successful applicant.
10. Recommendation for hiring is made contingent upon:
Favorable results from reference contacts.
Favorable results from "Home Base" visit.
Acceptance by the Board of the committee recommendation.

Teachers serve willingly on selection committees--even during time off. They provide insight and input about prospective staff that no individual person could supply. Our superintendent stated "The most valuable aspect of the involvement is that each member as an interviewer asks questions that a single interviewer would not ask. As a result, more information is brought out about a candidate, and a better selection is made because of a greater knowledge and information base available to the selectors. A single person could make better selections with that information available to him."

Finally, there is an economic side to employment--as you all know. When a teacher is hired, a school district faces a potential half million dollar investment. If you, business, or industry were considering an investment of that magnitude, no resources would be spared to insure the soundness of that investment. The most important aspect is the effort expended in the determination of the possible impact of a prospective teacher on the students in your school.